



Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2328/27231>

This is a scan of a document number DUN/Speeches/2433  
in the Dunstan Collection, Special Collections, Flinders University Library.  
<http://www.flinders.edu.au/library/info/collections/special/dunstan/>

**Title:**

Address by the Attorney-General of Australia at Conference on Book Imports into  
Australia, Boulevard Hotel, Sydney

Please acknowledge the source as:  
Dunstan Collection, Flinders University Library.  
Identifier: DUN/Speeches/2433

© Copyright Estate Donald Allan Dunstan

**ATTORNEY - GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT**

Address by the Attorney-General of Australia,  
Lionel Murphy, Q.C., at Conference on Book  
Imports into Australia. Boulevard Hotel,  
Sydney. April 19, 1974.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you to this Conference dealing with the important and controversial question of open and closed markets in the field of book importation.

Books form the basis of the culture of every civilized society and without ready access to books the growth and development of new ideas is impossible. We live in an era of rapid development in other forms of communication of ideas, such as television and broadcasting. But books remain a highly significant medium for the development of Australian culture and ideas.

Australia's remoteness from some of the more important cultural centres makes it vital that the Australian public should not be deprived of books by barriers in the form of high prices and undue delay.

The question to be discussed today is, basically, whether books are readily available to Australians and at reasonable prices.

Along with other Ministerial colleagues, I have followed closely the public discussion in the past year or so concerning barriers to access to books in Australia, particularly in the context of the British publishers traditional market agreement. I have also felt concern over complaints that I and other Ministers have received from members of the public asking the Government to take some action.

I know of some developments that have taken place. I am thinking in particular of the negotiations that took place last September between Australian and British publishers. I am sure you are all aware of them.

I welcome the fact that Australian publishers were able to negotiate beneficial changes in the British market agreement although I must confess that - as an Australian - I have strong reservations when British publishers continue to lay claim to Australia as a British preserve in their agreement. The issues concerning open and closed markets that are to be discussed to day will, however, range wider than the British Market Agreement, although I am sure that it will come in for its share of comment.

I have a special interest in your discussions because of my responsibility for the administration of the Copyright Act. It is through arrangements made under copyright legislation that practical legal effect is given in Australia to the splitting up of the market for books. The discussions that will take place today will no doubt involve the question whether there should be some change in the present scope of copyright protection.

Copyright legislation has long served the function of promoting cultural and intellectual pursuits, which are an important part of our community life and which have been given a great deal of support from the present Government.

We would not want to do anything in the copyright area which would undermine the work of authors, composers and other creators of cultural works in Australia. But copyright, like any other right conferred by the law, can be so manipulated that it ceases to serve a wider public interest. The scope of copyright protection must come into questions if the copyright law is used to deprive the public at large of access to cultural works on reasonable terms.

There is a delicate balance to be achieved between many competing interests. The presence here today of so many people representing commerce, libraries and authors bears witness to this effect. I have arranged for this conference to take place because it seemed to me important that all the interests involved should be given an opportunity to express their views and to discuss the problems. I do not expect that any unanimous opinion will emerge, but the exchange of views which will take place today will, I am sure, be of the utmost importance to the Government when it comes to decide what action it should take.

The conference therefore represents the wish of the Government to involve interested groups in the formation of policy, just as in other areas the Government has appointed commissions and boards of enquiry to produce reports. This is one facet of the concept of open Government which we believe to be of great value in a democratic society.

We have arranged for a number of speakers who are well qualified to represent various viewpoints to deliver papers to this conference. One of the papers will be presented by a senior officer of my Department. We have made arrangements to ensure that the views expressed here today are properly recorded so that they may all be taken into account when decisions are being made.

I wish the conference every success.

April 18, 1974  
Sydney

41/74